

*Gina Denny*

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Beta Read – [REDACTED]  
March 31, 2024

Hello, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I left comments in the margins, mostly with questions and suggestions. Every single suggestion is just that: a suggestion. You know your story best, and you know what is coming in the rest of the series, so you have the best vision for the manuscript. My feedback for the overall manuscript centers on basically three things: [The Call to Action](#), [Metaphorical Themes](#), [Memoir vs Roman à Clef](#).

### **The Call to Action**

Memoir differs from fiction mainly in its purpose. Fiction tells us a story, nonfiction teaches us something, and memoir blends the two. This isn't an autobiography, of course, which is just a factual retelling of the life of a person of significance. This is memoir, so it is snippets, pieces of a life with lessons for the reader to pick up and carry on with.

You've got the storytelling piece down. You've chosen a specific set of events that all intertwine with the theme of learning to trust your intuition. But it needs to be stronger than just a theme; it needs to be persuasive. At the end of every chapter, there should be just enough of a Call to Action to make the reader say, "Hey. Maybe I should do this, too."

Often in nonfiction, this call to action or summary is explicit. It gets listed specifically at the end of each chapter, with a section break or even a header of its own. I do not think that would serve your story. But integrating a forward-looking action or question can help keep the momentum of this journey of self-discovery moving in the right direction.

I left a few suggestions at the end of the first several chapters just to help jumpstart your brainstorm on these. I fully expect you to dismiss every single suggestion I made, as I cannot possibly know your mind as well as you do; these are just ways to get you thinking along the right lines. You'll find the right calls to make.

### **Metaphorical Themes**

On such a metaphysical journey, I would expect metaphor to play a stronger role in the narrative. You have some small bits of metaphor: the Lego block, the moth that lands on her hand only

after her transformation is complete. But there could be more, and you have several themes that run through the manuscript that feel like they're *almost* metaphoric, but aren't quite there yet.

Food runs through this story as a theme. [REDACTED] brings chocolate, [REDACTED] brings fruit. When [REDACTED] are fighting, he brings home food but she cooks it without consulting him.

Her friends bring things that don't require any work and she partakes without thinking about it. [REDACTED] brings food that requires work, and she does the work but without his input. He cooks without her input. She's also never the one providing food. There's a metaphor here that is *almost* tangible, but isn't quite there yet. I don't want to see it spelled out explicitly, but emphasize these moments a little more clearly. Write around the edges of these scenarios to make sure the audience sees the connection without you having to spell it out.

Going on a solo hike could be an excellent metaphor for striking out on her own, but it's also underdeveloped. I left a couple long comments in the margins about this one because it's much more straightforward to address in the manuscript itself.

The dog could also be a stronger metaphor. He balks against his training, needing a heavy hand at first. He's forced to sit, to stay, to perform for much longer than he wants to because he won't obey the commands that are being given to him. Over time, he develops patience and stillness and learns to obey without being told explicitly to do so. But then he's missing from the last few chapters of the book. Even if it doesn't make sense for him to be there, his *presence* could be felt. She could think about him or brag about him and how far he's come or even just miss him and wonder how he's doing, holding up his training in her absence.

This story is so heavily metaphysical that telling it so straight feels almost like a disservice. This story deserves to have layers and layers to it. It deserves to permeate every single aspect of [REDACTED]'s life.

I do *not* want to see dreams or meditation fill this space. Those things are important to the story and to the arc, but using dreams as metaphor is too obvious and will end up feeling cliché. Keep the dreams and the meditation, but don't use those things as metaphor.

### **Memoir vs Roman à Clef**

This is the hardest bit to nail down, so it's the biggest and the last piece.

Right now, this does not *quite* feel like a memoir. It feels like a roman à clef, a fictionalized version of real-life events. But it feels like a slightly underdeveloped novel. A memoir holds itself out as being fully true, to the best of the storyteller's ability. Fictionalized memoirs can result in lawsuits, cancelled contracts, the works. A roman à clef would need to be sold as a novel; in this case it would be women's fiction.

Memoir is nonfiction, and I think "the new Eat Pray Love" is an excellent way to pitch this, if you're going to pitch it as nonfiction; but nonfiction requires a platform. You didn't include any links, so I didn't go digging around to see if I could find you online. If you're going to sell this as a memoir, you'll need a platform. Bare minimum of five digits of social media followers, ideally

replicated on multiple platforms, bylines in multiple major national/international outlets, and connections within related/adjacent industries: podcasts with six-digit downloads monthly, a handful of well-known nonfiction authors in big cities who could host you for launch/tour events, things like that.

To sell this as memoir, you'll insert more of your current self into the narrative. More of an "I remember when..." vibe. You'll look back with the wisdom of your later self and see how these pieces were moving you toward the things and people you needed, instead of telling the story from the viewpoint of your younger self who does not yet know how the story turns out.

Women's fiction doesn't require a platform, but this manuscript is very short for women's fiction (ideally, you'd aim for something more like 85,000 – 110,000 words), and the writing feels almost too accessible to sell as literary. Your voice feels so authentic and real and friendly and I think there is a huge market waiting to be tapped here. If this is the route you ultimately decide to go, you'll need to spend time reading Celeste Ng, Liane Moriarty, and Jodi Picoult to get a sense of what that Gen-X women's fiction feels like and incorporate some of that vibe and that voice into your novel.

There are agents who are hungry for authentic millennial women's fiction (and they'll be asking for Gen Z women's fiction very soon, as the eldest Gen Zs are getting married and becoming disillusioned with adult life in their mid-twenties now), so this placement could work. But I think this is a bigger shift in your voice and writing than you might be willing to embrace.

Neither one of these options is wrong; you need to choose the one that feels truest to your story. I can't even say which I would prefer from you, because the story is engaging and gripping and could honestly go either way. You're on a pair of paths paved by some incredible women and you could genuinely pick either one and find success in it.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sincerely,  
Gina Denny